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The Trailblazer Apprenticeship – Is this the magic bullet that will cure the skills deficit?

A paper presented at the International Legal Ethics Conference VII on the 14th – 16th July 2018, Fordham University, New York.

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Abstract

The relationship between higher education and employability is recognised but not always understood. There is a constant debate on how students acquire the right types of skills which will address the criticism levelled at the way graduate employability is measured. The UK government has introduced a policy which is attempting to address the shortage of skills in the UK through the degree apprenticeship. This has had a direct impact on the reshaping of the curricula in many higher educational institutions. The introduction of the apprenticeship degree is challenging the way higher educational institutions design and deliver educational provision through work-based learning. The introduction of this policy has been controversial as it has encapsulated many professional pathways, such as law, medicine and aerospace engineering. This now requires higher educational institutions to accommodate these professional degree pathways, whilst having little say in how they have been initially constructed. These professional apprenticeships have been overseen by the Institute of Apprenticeships, who work with various employer groups and professional bodies referred to as the trailblazers. They produce the standards needed for a range of professions. The use of work-based learning through the apprenticeship, as a model of learning, has traditionally been used in various countries in order to formalise a progression of tasks that develop levels of competencies, skills and knowledge. The apprenticeship degree which is now linked with traditional pathways, such as qualifying as a lawyer has forced many higher educational institutions to overhaul their curricula and accommodate this pathway to qualify. In effect this means that many UK higher educational institutions will need to collaborate with a range of stakeholders, such as employers and professional bodies who design the standards expected from degree apprenticeship pathways. This is a formula which will induce fundamental changes in the way higher educational provision is designed and delivered in the near future.

Introduction

The relationship between higher education and employability has produced some controversial debates which are constantly being reviewed and reinvented by successive governments. These reviews are stimulated by governmental policies which focus on graduate skills and how the skills shortage in a global labour market can be addressed. The current trend in the UK is the creation of partnership relationships between higher educational institutions and employers to create work-based learning pathways through the degree apprenticeship. This was initiated by the Richard Review (2012) who recommended that the design and development of the apprenticeship qualification be led by the employer and not the educational institution. This suggestion has since been implemented by the UK government (Richard 2011, p.7) and has sent a strong message to higher educational institutions who must now develop a range of pathways to accommodate the emerging degree apprenticeship. This places higher educational institutions in the UK in a precarious position as they must produce a framework for the co-production of knowledge, alongside the work-based learning experience for these apprentices (Boud & Solomon 2001). They must now re-design their curricula which will complement the standards set by trailblazers (employers and professional bodies) who in turn must create a curriculum for the workplace. Developing a work-based learning (apprenticeship) partnership between higher educational institutions and commerce has raised concerns over the quality or standards dealing with the particular modes of learning or the appropriateness of the assessment process (Boud & Solomon 2001). This is a symptom which needs to be addressed as the debate between what is academic content and the tacit skills developed in the workplace need to be agreed upon by all parties concerned. It is the bringing together of the knowledge and skills which will need to be nurtured through these trailblazer degree apprenticeships. For example, the workplace curriculum will need to foster the application of the knowledge through the day-to-day activities undertaken by the apprentice. This model of learning is supported by Billett (2001, Pp.104-105) who believes this framework will take a novice through to being a professional practitioner. A position supported by Lave and Wenger (1991) who have used their theory of situated learning which supports Billett's approach that learners (apprentices) will form part of their working community and in time master the skills and knowledge whilst they participate in the sociocultural practices of their community

(1991, p.29). This in turn should develop the necessary skills and knowledge currently lacking in a global labour market. For example, the British Chambers of Commerce in 2016 and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills reported a shortage of specialist skills and knowledge needed to undertake a range of professional occupations within the UK (Thornton 2016). This has been a continuing criticism of the UK employment market and many occupations have remained unfilled due to a shortage of skills (Thornton 2016). The UK government has responded by introducing its magic bullet: the 'trailblazer' apprenticeship. The policy behind this government initiative is to recruit 3 million apprentices in England by 2020. The key stakeholders driving this policy are the UK government, employers and professional bodies. Together, these stakeholders are calling upon higher educational institutions to create the degree apprenticeship. The uptake of the trailblazer apprenticeship is likely to place a high demand on higher educational institutions. Unlike traditional academic courses, which are student funded, the trailblazer apprenticeship is either wholly or partly funded by the UK government. This means apprentices will not incur student fees and will be paid a wage by their employer. The trailblazer apprenticeship is therefore a combination of paid employment, which incorporates training within the workplace and attendance at a higher educational institution. They are available in over 1,500 occupations in more than 170 industries (Powell 2017: 4). Given these factors it is inevitable that these macro-political policies dealing with work-based learning, such as the degree apprenticeship, will force higher educational institutions in the UK to reconfigure their pedagogical practices to accommodate these apprentices.

Work-based learning

The fusion of work-based learning, alongside reading for a degree is not unique in itself. However, the expansion and speed at which the degree apprenticeships has been introduced is placing pressure on higher educational institutions who were neither party to the policy making process nor the educational standards of the degree apprenticeship. Higher educational institutions need to reposition themselves. They are currently being led by government policy which is dictating the re-design of the curricula in higher educational institutions. In this instance the designing, implementing and delivery of higher educational provision is essential when

considering any changes to the curricula, or introducing a new framework such as the apprenticeship model. Higher educational institutions need to be part of the decision making process in order to put in place the necessary teaching, learning and training provisions that are needed to support the upcoming changes. Whilst information and forums are being set up to discuss the implementation of the degree apprenticeship there has been little or no engagement with higher educational institutions to shape and design the apprenticeship pathway. Instead, stakeholders such as professional bodies and employers are designing the standards expected from degree apprenticeships. An example is the Solicitors Regulatory Authority (SRA) who govern the educational provision and qualification of solicitors in England and Wales. They have produced consultation documents but have not included higher educational institutions in the 'actual' design stages. The design and assessment has been undertaken by a selected number of employers (solicitor firms) who have collaborated with the SRA and Institute of Apprenticeships. This has raised a number of issues for higher educational institutions, such as the re-design and delivery of vocational education to accommodate the apprenticeship degree. Many believe an increase in education and skills through the apprenticeship degree, will not address the skills shortage but instead will lead to an "... occupational congestion, over qualification and the evidence that skills supply does not always create its own demand" (Keep and Mayhew, p.766). This is an interesting perception as one of the arguments for the degree apprenticeship is to remove inequality. This is an argument which is put forward by the SRA who believe the solicitor apprenticeship will open up the profession to a wider range of backgrounds (Ivens 2014, p.15). A number of legal firms based in the UK but who operate within a global market recognise the apprenticeship as a means to widen access to qualify as a solicitor. One such legal practice is Mayer Brown who have backed the government led trailblazer apprenticeship route to qualify as a solicitor (Connelly, 2017). They are amending their current training programme to accommodate the trailblazer solicitor apprenticeship model. Their apprentices will work four days and will have day-release to attend law school on the fifth day. A similar approach is taken by the international law firms Dentons and Addleshaw Goddard. They have introduced the trailblazer solicitor apprenticeship which will incorporate a similar delivery pattern to that of Mayer Brown. In this instance change is needed to open up the market and create a real opportunity to practise law and not just study law as an academic subject. This is

evident from The Law Society Annual Statistics Report which was published in April 2017. This report provided the data on the number of students who graduated with a Qualifying Law Degree (QLD), completed the Legal Practice Certificate (postgraduate qualification) and obtained a two year training contract to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales. These statistics demonstrate there are only a limited amount of training contracts available. For example, in 2016 the number of QLD graduates was 15,950. These figures were made up of 5,817 males and 10,133 females. In July of 2016 there were only 5,728 trainee solicitors registered and 2,162 were male and 3,566 were female. These figures demonstrate that a high number of law graduate will not be able to qualify as a solicitor and this is because the number of training contracts are limited. Whereas the trailblazer solicitor apprenticeship is an alternative route and may also appeal to employers, as well as apprentices as there are a number of incentives. The apprenticeship degree is government funded. This means the apprenticeship pathway is debt free. Employers may be eligible for funding and these are positive steps being taken to create an open market which will utilise the apprenticeship model as a means to qualify in a chosen profession. A government policy which is receiving financial support and placing employers in a dominant position when it comes to setting standards they expect in the workplace.

The National Apprenticeship Service, which forms part of the Skills Funding Agency in the UK coordinates apprenticeships in England. They support the apprenticeship pathway by advertising and recruiting a range of professional apprenticeships, such as Aerospace engineers, Health Care Assistant Practitioners, Supply Chain Managers and Teachers. These are just a sample of the professional apprenticeships that have been introduced in England. This is attempting to address the criticism dealing with graduate employability, ie, finding employment after obtaining a degree, whereas the degree apprenticeship is introducing employability at the beginning of the degree. This is defined by Lee (2012, p.225) as: "... a system of training whereby an individual develops skills and knowledge whilst at the same time working for an employer." Whereas, graduate skills and the way employability is usually measured in the UK is not popular with some critics, such as Dacre Pool et al (2014) who considered the way graduates and employability were being measured:

Currently in the UK, the measure mostly associated with graduate employability is an annual survey (Destinations of Leavers from HE or DHLE) which looks at the number of graduates who secure full-time “graduate jobs” within six months of graduation. This information is used to rank HE institutions into league tables that purport to indicate the success of universities in relation to the employability of their graduates (p.304).

There is some merit in their argument and this has been considered by the Higher Education Research Careers Service Unit (HECSU) and the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) (Ball et al, 2017, p.2) who have responded to this criticism by saying they collaborate with a wide range of sources to understand the graduate employment market that undergraduates are preparing to enter. In their current report they state:

...despite the uncertainty surrounding the UK’s medium term economic prospects, the graduate labour market has largely held up well. Annual Population Survey data from the Office of National Statistics shows that over 14 million workers in the UK were in professional-level jobs at the end of 2016. Moreover, 440,000 new professional-level jobs had been added in the UK in 2016, with particularly large rises in science and engineering, and business and financial services positions (p.6).

This is a positive response but HECSU (2017, p.4) also reported a fall in the level of skills in 2017, such as in the British Chambers of Commerce where there was a shortfall of 74% of employers in manufacturing. They also considered the impact of the degree apprenticeship as an alternative pathway into higher education and noted they are designed by employers and professional bodies. They believe degree apprenticeships will provide an opportunity to:

... combine university study with workplace learning. ... apprentices will be developing academic knowledge in tandem with building the skills and behaviours that employers need. As a result, it is argued that people who complete apprenticeships are highly employable. Those who proceed through the apprenticeship route also have the added advantage of gaining

no debt, as the tuition fees are jointly paid by employers and the government, and at the same time, the apprentice is a paid employee of a company (p.30)

If degree apprenticeships are to be a success and form part of the workplace curriculum it will also need a curriculum to accommodate the educational provision provided by higher educational institutions. This is the issue that has not been thought through as higher educational institutions have not been part of the design stage. They are not members of the trailblazer. If the degree apprenticeship is to be the magic bullet to cure the shortage of skills it has a fatal flaw. It is not allowing higher educational institutions the opportunity to work with the trailblazers. For the degree apprenticeship to be a success it is important that higher educational institutions develop a stronger role in the development of degree pathways. Higher educational representative must reposition their role and be part of the trailblazer consortium. If they continue to be on the outside, looking-in they will not have a place at the table and will not be part of the decision making process. This is essential if higher educational institutions are going to introduce the appropriate pathway for these professional apprenticeships. This will allow higher educational institutions to be in partnership with professional bodies and ensure the appropriate knowledge and skills form part of the curricula dealing directly with work-based learning through the integration of employability.

Employability, in this context, is a combination of many aspects and Yorke (2006) provides a broad view when defining what is employability:

“... a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (p. 8).

This is a helpful starting point but this is assuming graduates develop these skills and they are recognised by the community which will see these skills as adding value to the economy. Definitions give us a narrative and, in this instance, is trying to provide us with a framework that will produce a graduate who is able to provide a level of

professional performance which will support an employer's business. However, Yorke is not saying how these attributes are achieved or how they are formulated. Whereas the response of the UK government is to introduce the higher apprenticeship which is forcing Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to re-position themselves in the market but without a voice at the design stage of the apprenticeship degree. Higher educational institutions design degree pathways that support a range of professions and must be part of the trailblazer group when the standards are set for a higher degree apprenticeship. This is a sensible approach and one that needs to be adopted.

The Trailblazer – a mutually exclusive

In June 2012 the then coalition government in the UK commissioned Doug Richard to undertake a review of the apprentice model in England. Richard was asked to consider the role of the apprentice model; how a new model would accommodate the skills shortage in England and how the government could invest and drive this new model forward (Hancock, 2013, p.3). Therefore, Richard (2012) was tasked with changing the existing apprenticeship module to meet the demand of a skills shortage. He found that previous government intervention had diminished the relationship between the employer and apprentice. He proposed that the apprenticeship model should be constructed by the employer who should identify the specific skills needed to be developed in order to produce a competent professional employee (2012, p.7). Whereas the role of the government should be to maintain the quality of the apprenticeship but leave the development and content of the apprenticeship to the employer. His recommendations are encapsulated in the following statement:

'... the new apprenticeship qualifications at the heart of my recommendations focus solely on setting out, in terms relevant and meaningful for employers, what an apprentice should be able to do and know at the end of their apprenticeship. ... to teach new knowledge and skills, and demonstrate to future employers that an apprentice can do their job. These new apprenticeship qualifications should replace today's apprenticeship frameworks. They should be set by those who know best: employers. ... The solution lies in shifting the power over designing and developing apprenticeship qualifications to employers in a far more direct

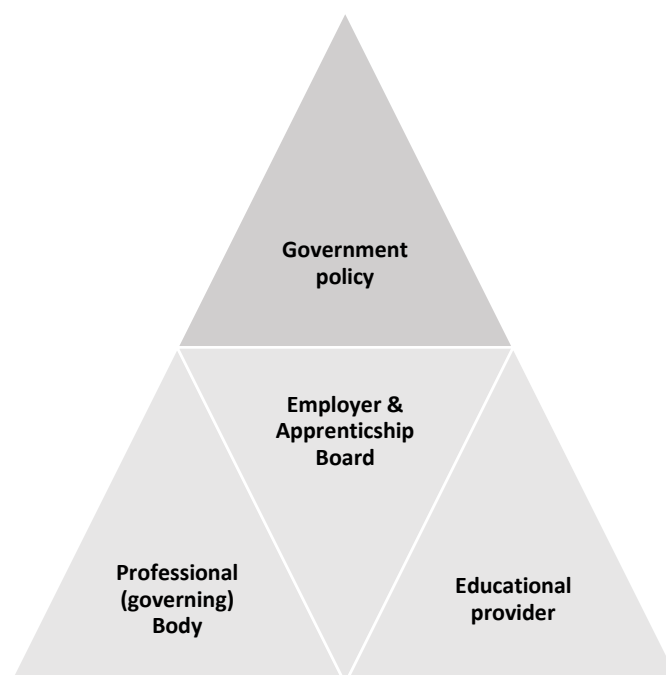
and transparent way than at present, whilst giving Government a clearer role in defining what a good quality standard looks like.’ (Pp.6-7)

These recommendations have been implemented and apprentices are now enrolled against an apprenticeship standard which is produced by the employer, who also produces an assessment plan. The task of overseeing the quality of the apprenticeship standard and assessment plan is undertaken by the Institute for Apprenticeship Board. A Board set up by the UK government to oversee the quality of new apprenticeships. The Institute for Apprenticeship Board’s remit is to ensure any new trailblazer apprenticeship, designed by an employers in collaboration with any professional (governing) body, is at the appropriate standard. This approach is embraced by Antony Jenkins, the current Shadow Chair of the Board who has acknowledged the need to reform the apprenticeship model in England and this was made clear in his statement in January 2017:

‘... For too long this country [UK] has under invested in skills and subsequently we’ve lost the support, and confidence, of employers and apprentices along the way. ... we have the funding in place, a broad agenda of skills reform offering the opportunity to achieve comprehensive and coherent change, and a plan to embed employers within the decision-making structure of the Institute.’ (Institute for Apprenticeships: p.2)

This statement makes it clear that employers will be at the centre of the decision making process when it comes to identifying and designing the key skills that are linked to a specific apprenticeship. Employers will also select the higher educational institution who is able to deliver the educational provision in accordance with their assessment plan. Whereas the role of the Institute for Apprenticeship Board will be to review and approve the assessment plan. This design is reflecting the dual apprenticeship model used in Germany which gives employers the opportunity to identify the required skills and underpinning knowledge required for a specific profession. This involves a collaborative approach between vocational schools and various businesses or professions. It is seen as the norm to undertake an apprenticeship in Germany, such as nursing. This has resulted in about 50 percent of school leavers in Germany entering into an apprenticeship (Brockmann, Clarke and Winch, 2010, p.113). The success of the dual apprenticeship system is the integration

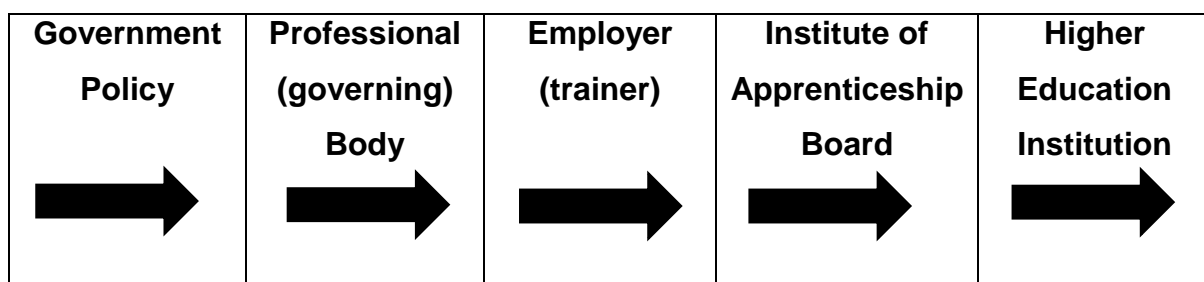
of industry with vocational schools and divides the experiential learning between the classroom, which is paid for by the German Government, and within the workplace environment which is paid for by the employer. This combination of theory and practice has been a success in Germany (Mühlemann 2016). The dual apprenticeship has reduced the rate of unemployment for young people in Germany, whilst at the same time developing the required skills to maintain a healthy economy (Gessler, 2017, p.72). The diagram below illustrates where the parties sit in the developmental structure of this new apprenticeship model in the UK.



The diagram (above) places the government at the top of this relationship as it is initially driven by government policy. Whilst the employer and Institute for Apprenticeship develop and maintain the apprenticeship standards, as well as reviewing and approving the assessment plan. The professional bodies, who govern professional standards, will have a direct input to the level of competency needed to qualify within a particular profession. It is only at the end of this hierarchical chain does the role of the educational provider come in to play. Yet, it will be for higher educational institutions to take up the reins and support this government initiative. The UK government are using all means possible to ensure their policy is introduced and will be taken up by employers. For example, in 2016 they introduced legislation, the

Enterprise Act 2016 (the Act), to strengthen the apprenticeship brand by creating a 'statutory apprenticeship' which means that you can only use the word apprenticeship (in England) if it relates to an apprenticeship linked to the above government policy. The Act also introduced recruitment targets for apprenticeships within the public sector bodies within England. This means there will be a recruitment figure set by the Secretary of State for England each and every year. The overall recruitment of apprentices at the time of writing has resulted in 900,000 funded apprentices who have participated in an apprenticeship in the 2015 to 2016 academic year (Powell 2017, p.4). This demonstrates that the UK government policy is increasing the recruitment of the apprentice and has drawn upon a wide range of professions such as accountancy, Law and aerospace engineering. This has been made possible by integrating the trailblazer apprenticeship within higher educational degrees which support a range of professions. This is changing the way higher educational qualifications are being constructed and delivered in the UK. Professional bodies who govern specific professions are supporting the apprenticeship route and this has placed the burden on higher educational institutions to transform the range of educational pathways at degree or masters level which now form part of the trailblazer apprenticeship in England.

These are legitimate contentions that need to be explored between professional bodies and higher educational institutions. This is as a direct result of the macro political environment which higher educational institutions do not have much influence or very little control. In this instance, a government policy is having a direct effect on a number of stakeholders, such as higher educational institutions, who must now work within a cross-functional relationship in order to add-value to the design, development and delivery of the trailblazer apprenticeship. This is illustrated in the diagram below.



Each of the above units (bodies) is contributing (inputting) to the process and this is the rationale behind the UK government policy who believe this will cure the shortage of skills using the degree apprenticeship pathway. The use of the apprenticeship is a universal model which embodies the development of skills formation across a range of professions from plumbers to journalists. It is a model of learning which is recognised in a global market and transcends the hierarchies of politics and educational institutions (Fuller and Unwin 2011: 261). However, the trailblazer apprenticeship is challenging higher educational institutions who are now operating under quasi-market conditions and are competing for students (apprentices) who are providing a new income stream. These are the macro (external) forces which need to be managed by higher educational institutions who will have to develop the employability skills of apprentices to support them in the workplace. The internal effect (micro environment) on higher education institutions is that academic staff will need to adapt and evolve their role to support the development of apprenticeship pathways (Fletcher 2007: 311). Barnett (2005: 29) believes such contemporary government policies will erode academic activities, such as research and this will diminish the academic development of higher educational institutions. The focus will be on commercial interests which will shape the way teaching and research will develop in the near future. This in turn will transform the pedagogic relationship between tutor and student to one of producer of a product (tutor input) and the student as a consumer (output). If this is correct, the values and aims of higher educational institutions, as centres of academic research, will in substance be replaced. The grafting of a consumerist framework onto higher educational institutions, with a different set of values, will diminish the relationship between tutor and student (apprentice). The use of the apprenticeship system has been forced upon higher educational institutions who must now develop their students' (apprentices') skills and enhance their employability.

Employability

Education and employability may be perceived as a mutual benefit: those who are educated will have a better opportunity of being employed. Employers will benefit from an educated workforce, as employers will be able to support the commercial enterprise. Higher educational institutions have always developed their students' knowledge whilst they read for a degree. This is a productive process which produces

a number of academic skills which should be transferable to the workplace. However, academic skills do not always accommodate the occupational role of the would-be employee. For example, the UK Commission's Employer Skills Survey 2015 found that there was an imbalance between being over qualified for a particular occupation but lacking the specific skills needed to perform their duties (Thornton et al: 77). The solution appears to be the fusion of professional knowledge and skills to meet the changing needs of a flexible, global, market. The UK market appears to be susceptible to unemployment due to an over subscription of knowledge based employees who do not have the skills for a range of professional occupations. This criticism is based upon pure market forces: supply and demand and Brown et al (2003:111) supports this view:

'Whether they [graduates] find employment will depend on whether there are other more qualified or experienced people looking for the same kind of work. But in terms of graduate employability, a key question is employable for what?'

This is a damning statement and does not instil confidence for the upcoming graduate. It suggests that the graduate will have to develop the skills and expertise after completing their degree. This is a global problem as the OECD (2016: 7) found that 'On average, more than 40% of European workers feel their skill levels do not correspond to those required to do their job, with similar findings for Mexico, Japan and Korea. The lack of skills is an on-going concern as it has been estimated that in the near future 3 million new professional jobs will be created. There will be a need to upskill the workforce as 19.4 million new jobs will require medium and low-level qualifications' (OECD 2016: 12). This is a global problem and a number of countries, such as Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Portugal, the Slovak Republic and UK have created a skills council which are employer led. They are government funded and created to identify and produce a policy on skills. The UK government has followed the apprenticeship route as one avenue to cure the shortage of skills for graduate professions.

Repositioning the University through knowledge based employment

The role of higher educational institutions is to provide educational provision for professional pathways. With the introduction of the apprenticeship degree, higher educational institutions will need to reposition themselves in order to accommodate the changes that are taking place. For example, the graduate has the potential to gain employment but obtaining a degree does not necessarily give instant access to a professional occupation. Brown et al (200:115) suggests higher educational degrees need more than pure knowledge and academic skills. Graduates need to acquire skills that will broaden their opportunities and make themselves more marketable.

With a growing number of knowledge based workers the future of work in the twenty-first century is not just about obtaining a good honours degree. In addition to obtaining higher educational qualifications the graduate needs to supplement their personal qualities and obtain appropriate skills which will lead to employment. The graduate may match the necessary credentials but in substance lack the personal qualities to compete in an oversubscribed market. This highlights a deficiency in successive government policies: increasing the number of knowledge-based workers but not equipping them with the personal qualities or appropriate skills. The current debate is now considering the individual's employability and the opportunities that will be made available to graduates through the apprenticeship model. This is why the current UK government is working with employers and professional governing bodies. They also need to be working even more closely with higher educational institutions and discuss the redesign of their degree pathways which will incorporate the required skills needed to compete in a domestic and global market. This would give higher educational institutions the opportunity to discuss the development of their curricula and respond by creating these new pathways for different apprenticeship routes. This would lead to diversity and possibly increase the opportunities for employability. However, it would seem that current government initiatives, concerning the expansion of higher education and the development of the students' needs through the curricula are not always put first. Barnett and Coate (2005:1) are critical of the way agents of the government have not only formulated their proposals but also they believe that the needs of the students are being ignored and suggest:

What students should be experiencing is barely a topic for debate. What the building blocks of their course might be and how they should be put together are even more absent from the general discussion. The very idea of curriculum is pretty well missing altogether.

The policy debate dealing with the curricula and government policy is very much an on-going debate. Higher educational institutions need to make stronger links with specific industries which will provide students with an opportunity to enhance their skills and compete in a global workplace. This would allow students to develop the skills needed in a particular profession and add value to their professional profile. This is an on-going social process which would enable students (apprentices) to acquire new skills that are inextricably repackaged and utilised through a combination of social networks linked with higher education (Brown et al 2003:127).

The degree apprenticeship model – is this the magic bullet?

Whether or not the degree apprenticeship model will cure the shortage of skills only time will reveal the outcome. At present it is a formula for employability contained within a pathway which will need the collaboration of employers and higher educational institutions. The government's rationale behind these fundamental changes to educational provision and the way it is being delivered is to develop the skills which will raise standards within a range of professions and produce a stronger economy in the UK. The UK government believe this is achievable through the introduction of the 'new' apprenticeship model. This model, they argue, will focus on work-based learning which is designed to incorporate the concept of both experiential learning and experience of learning within an environment which is conducive to developing appropriate skills and acquiring related knowledge needed for specific occupations.

Combining theoretical and vocational aspects into a higher educational pathway will support the skills formation and a means to creating employability through the apprenticeship degree. The bonding together of knowledge and practical skills needed to undertake specific tasks for a specified profession is a real-life experience for the apprentice. For this to work these professional skills will only be created if there is a stronger relationship between higher educational institutions and employers.

Together they need to create an opportunity for these professional skills to be developed within the workplace environment. It is this linkage that does not appear to be emerging. The OECD (2016: 12) reported that: 'Stakeholders and businesses recognise that better aligning education and workforce needs is a top priority. In fact, job creation in Europe and the United States up to 2020 will largely be driven by growth in high-skilled occupations.' This is a concerning statement as the need to invest in the apprenticeship degree is a way to treat this as an emerging market and an opportunity for investment. The distinction between the graduate apprentice and the traditional graduate pathway is employability. The assumption that a university degree, in itself, will provide the skills needed to gain employment is no longer acceptable. The growth of higher education (Stevens 2004) and transmission of pure knowledge is not providing today's workforce with the skills needed to compete in a global market. The notion of reading for a degree and employability is well founded but there has been growing concern that the skills needed by many business are not being developed by graduates. This is supported by the work of Spielhofer and Sims (2004: 112) who found that many UK businesses lacked the relevant skills needed to compete in a global market. Their criticism is based upon the argument that the transmission of education and the development of academic skills are not always compatible with vocational skills needed to be employed. Although many higher educational courses integrate a package of skills, which are transferable into the working environment, there is continuing criticism that the labour market in the UK is falling short of the required skills needed to compete in a global economy. This criticism has supported the argument that the use of vocational education and training through the apprenticeship model will cure the current defects and produce the required skills.

The nurturing of the apprentice as a model of learning

If higher educational institutions are to build an apprenticeship pathway they need to understand how the apprenticeship model of learning functions. The very thought of using the apprenticeship, as a model of learning at an institution of higher education is an anathema for some Universities. The apprenticeship model needs to be viewed as an investment of time and during this period value needs to be added at each stage of the journey for the apprentice. It is a nurturing process as the apprentice will be

introduced to an environment which will develop a number of practical skills. This includes a social process which will include learning how to undertake specific duties and is a personal journey for the apprentice (Illeris, 2003, p.169). There will be a pattern of learning taking place which will be modelled on colleagues who have a number of years of experience within a profession. There is a strong connection between behaviourism and the nurturing of the apprenticeship. The apprentice is responding to a stimuli in a deterministic manner which is akin to learning by imitation (Jordan, Carlile and Stack, 2008, p.21). Billett refers to this as “mimesis” whereby the apprentice will observe, imitate and then practise the task (2012, 9.10-9.31). The apprentice will be exposed to the workplace environment and will be able to develop the professional skills which will link directly to the educational provision needed to support the process. It is fundamental that the apprentice is able to acquire the functioning knowledge and skills of the particular profession. The undertaking of professional activities within the working environment will develop the tacit skills, whilst learning about the professional standards. This on-going process will lead to a change in the apprentice’s behaviour as a result of the experience. The apprentice conforms to observable behaviour (Jordan, Carlile & Stack, 2008, p.21) and leads to professional standards.

The implementation of the trailblazer apprenticeship in England should provide an opportunity for self-directed learning to take place (Illeris, 2003, p.172). Illeris (2003, p.172-3) believes that individuals take responsibility for their own learning within a work-based environment and this is a natural process that takes place. This is supported by Billett (2016, p.614) who adopts a similar approach. He believes learners mediate the learning process whilst developing their occupational skills and this will develop the skills and knowledge of the apprentice during the nurturing period. This has been the underpinning argument presented by Billett (2012, 3.47-4.11) who believes there is a distinction between the learning that is shaped and delivered within the workplace. He is of the opinion (Billett, 2012, 3.47-4.11) that this form of learning takes place during the nurturing process through the application of work experience and not within an educational institution. It is for the educational institution to engage with industry and develop the appropriate touch-points to introduce the apprentice to the required knowledge needed for the specific profession. This will then create a

'real' model of learning which will support the trailblazer apprenticeship in the context of higher educational provision and the development of appropriate skills.

Conclusion

The introduction of the apprenticeship through the degree pathway within higher educational institutions in the UK will need time to adjust and be accepted. The perception of the apprenticeship has been seen by some academics as purely vocational who find it difficult to appreciate the pedagogic process that takes place through the apprenticeship route. The apprenticeship, as a model of learning, in the UK has traditionally focussed on specific types of professions which have been linked to manual trades such as mechanical engineering. These forms of apprenticeships have been viewed as an inferior form of learning when compared to some European Union State apprenticeship models, such as Germany which operates the dual system of apprenticeship. This approach needs to be fostered between higher educational institutions and industry in the UK. If the Trailblazer apprenticeship is going to be the magic bullet that cures the shortage of skills there must be stronger collaboration which will fuse together the apprenticeship pathway through education and workplace learning. This is the key factor which will determine the success of the apprenticeship, as a model of learning, within higher educational institutions. The demand for a professional workforce who have the appropriate skills to compete in a global markets is needed to ensure apprentices are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed for a range of professions.

The OECD (2016) have identified the problems faced by countries in Europe, Australia and the USA. The development of higher education as part of an apprenticeship pathway is one way to integrate skills and education. For the apprenticeship model to succeed and be firmly establish as a pathway higher educational institutions need to develop their understanding and application of the apprenticeship model. This will foster the apprenticeship as a progressive model of learning which will nurture the learning process in the classroom and within the working environment. This is supported by the work of Fuller and Unwin who argue that the apprenticeship model is constantly changing and evolving to meet the demands placed upon industry and professional bodies within the UK. The different approaches taken by different

countries when dealing with the apprenticeship route demonstrates its strength as a model of learning. It will continue to evolve as an instrument of government policy and should be viewed as a vehicle for learning. It is through this perspectives that you are able to question and investigate the development of the apprenticeship as a model of learning within the United Kingdom. The trailblazer apprenticeship is directly linked to a range of professions, such as the apprentice solicitor who will be practising law in the workplace and at the same time develop the knowledge of the law, legal rules, at University. This is a real opportunity for the apprentice to engage and develop their skills and supplement their knowledge whilst reading for a degree. This also supports the argument that the social interaction within the working environment provides an opportunity for the apprentice to assimilate the language, knowledge, skills and transform into a competent, professional person.

There are many issues that the degree apprenticeship has introduced for higher educational institutions. Mainly the lack of consultation and not being part of the trailblazer group. This has cause for concern and needs to be addressed. There needs to be inclusion if higher educational institutions are going to be able to create these pathways for degree apprenticeships. It is time for the UK government to consult with higher educational institutions and not just expect educational provision to appear at the point of delivery. The current position is that the trailblazer apprenticeship will have a profound effect on the way higher educational provision is developed and provided in the near future. The pace at which the current UK government has implemented the degree apprenticeship will have a direct effect on the business model(s) being used by many higher educational institutions. It will be for higher educational institutions to accommodate these changes and this will only be possible if there is a closer relationship between industry and higher educational institutions. It is for this reason that higher educational institutions must form part of the trailblazer consortium. It is currently excluded and not part of the formation of the professional apprenticeship degree and this needs to change.

Please note that the submitted papers has been updated prior to being submitted in its first draft. This was to accommodate the feedback and new materials that now appear in this paper.

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